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[4.]

TC72

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL
NURNBERG, GERMANY
GB Exhibit 39
Filed Dec 6 1945

Miscellaneous No. 9 (1939)

DOCUMENTS

CONCERNING

GERMAN-POLISH RELATIONS

AND THE

OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty

B 043283

LONDON
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE
To be purchased directly from H.M. STATIONERY OFFICE at the following addresses:
York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2; 120 George Street, Edinburgh 2;
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1939

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GB-55

Developments leading immediately to the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939.

No. 56.

Letter of August 22, 1939, from the Prime Minister to the German Chancellor.

Your Excellency, 10 *Downing Street, August* 22, 1939.

Your Excellency will have already heard of certain measures taken by His Majesty's Government, and announced in the press and on the wireless this evening.

H3576 – 0003

H3576 – 0004

These steps have, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, been rendered necessary by the military movements which have been reported from Germany, and by the fact that apparently the announcement of a German-Soviet Agreement is taken in some quarters in Berlin to indicate that intervention by Great Britain on behalf of Poland is no longer a contingency that need be reckoned with. No greater mistake could be made. Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly, and which they are determined to fulfil.

It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding.

If the case should arise, they are resolved, and prepared, to employ without delay all the forces at their command, and it is impossible to foresee the end of hostilities once engaged. It would be a dangerous illusion to think that, if war once starts, it will come to an early end even if a success on any one of the several fronts on which it will be engaged should have been secured.

Having thus made our position perfectly clear, I wish to repeat to you my conviction that war between our two peoples would be the greatest calamity that could occur. I am certain that it is desired neither by our people, nor by yours, and I cannot see that there is anything in the questions arising between Germany and Poland which could not and should not be resolved without the use of force, if only a situation of confidence could be restored to enable discussions to be carried on in an atmosphere different from that which prevails to-day.

We have been, and at all times will be, ready to assist in creating conditions in which such negotiations could take place, and in which it might be possible concurrently to discuss the wider problems affecting the future of international relations, including matters of interest to us and to you.

The difficulties in the way of any peaceful discussion in the present state of tension are, however, obvious, and the longer that tension is maintained, the harder will it be for reason to prevail.

These difficulties, however, might be mitigated, if not removed, provided that there could for an initial period be a truce on both sides—and indeed on all sides—to press polemics and to all incitement.

If such a truce could be arranged, then, at the end of that period, during which steps could be taken to examine and deal with complaints made by either side as to the treatment of minorities, it is reasonable to hope that suitable conditions might have been established for direct negotiations between Germany and Poland upon the issues between them (with the aid of a neutral intermediary, if both sides should think that that would be helpful).

H3576 – 0005

But I am bound to say that there would be slender hope of bringing such negotiations to successful issue unless it were understood beforehand that any settlement reached would, when concluded, be guaranteed by other Powers. His Majesty's Government would be ready, if desired, to make such contribution as they could to the effective operation of such guarantees.

At this moment I confess I can see no other way to avoid a catastrophe that will involve Europe in war.

In view of the grave consequences to humanity, which may follow from the action of their rulers, I trust that Your Excellency will weigh with the utmost deliberation the considerations which I have put before you.

Yours sincerely,
NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN

No. 57.

Sir N. Henderson to Viscount Halifax (*received August* 24).

(Telegraphic.) *Berlin, August* 23, 1939.

Two difficulties were raised last night before visit to Herr Hitler was actually arranged. In first place it was asked whether I would not be ready to wait until Herr von Ribbentrop's return. I said that I could not wait as my instructions were to hand letter myself as soon as possible. An hour or so later I was rung up again by State Secretary on the telephone asking for gist of letter and referring to publication of some private letter addressed to Herr Hitler last year. I told Baron von Weizsäcker that I had no recollection of publication of any private letter last year and assured him that there was no intention of publishing this one. As regards Prime Minister's letter I said that its three main points were (1) that His Majesty's Government was determined to fulfil their obligations to Poland, (2) that they were prepared, provided a peace atmosphere was created, to discuss all problems affecting our two countries, and (3) that during period of truce they would welcome direct discussions between Poland and Germany in regard to minorities.

State Secretary appeared to regard these replies as likely to be satisfactory, but deferred a final answer till 8 A.M. this morning. At that hour he telephoned me to say that arrangements made had been confirmed and that he would accompany me to Berchtesgaden, leaving Berlin at 9·30 A.M.

We arrived Salzburg soon after 11 A.M. and motored to Berchtesgaden, where I was received by Herr Hitler shortly after 1 P.M. I had derived impression that atmosphere was likely to be most unfriendly and that probability was that interview would be exceedingly brief.

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TC-72-56
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OFFICE OF U.S. CHIEF OF COUNSEL FOR WAR CRIMES

EVIDENCE DIVISION

Date : 2 August 1948

I certify that Document Number TC-72-56 was introduced into evidence as Exhibit Number GB-55 in the Trial by the International Tribunal of Hermann GOERING, et al, which commenced on 20 November 1945, and that the attached photostat is a true and correct copy of the original.

Fred Niebergall

Fred NIEBERGALL
Chief, Document
Control Branch.

H3576 - 0006

H3576 - 0007

C E R T I F I C A T E

I hereby certify that the annexed document TC-72-56 No. GB-55 is a photostat of an original document submitted in evidence by the British Prosecution under this number. The original document has been withdrawn in accordance with Rule 10 of the International Military Tribunal, and to the best of my knowledge and belief is to be held at the OCCWC Evidence Library, Palace of Justice, Nuremberg

Paul Joosten

PAUL A. JOOSTEN

General Secretary
International Military Tribunal

Nuremberg, 28 July 1948

H-3576

GB-55

TC-42-56

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H3576 – 0008